An Appraisal of Primary First-Cycle English Textbooks

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine whether or to what extent the English textbooks in-use in primary first-cycle schools in Ethiopia meet the criteria of good EFL textbook to the age group. The contents of grades 1-4 English textbooks are reviewed qualitatively through adapting criteria developed by Balbi (1997, 2008) and the relevant literature. The research design is descriptive-evaluative. The procedure of analyzing the data starts by reviewing the contents of grades 1-4 English textbooks based on EFL evaluation criteria; it is subsequently followed by finding out how much each item of the checklist meets the criteria of good EFL textbook and concluding the result of the analysis in the form of explaining the reasons why each criterion considered meets the criteria. The result shows that the language contents encompassed in the textbooks are adequate and appropriate to promote students mastery of the English language.

Keywords: Competence, Critical Thinking, Elementary School, Foreign Language, Language Achievement

Background of the study

Textbooks play a fundamental role in ELT (Tomilson, 2003). Textbooks are among the many kinds of instructional materials specially aimed at offering classroom practice for students and promote successful and rapid learning of the language (Sheldon, 1988). They are important sources of language input that learners receive in the classroom (O'Neill, 1982). They do not only provide a framework for teachers in achieving the aims and objectives of the course, but also provide ideas on how to teach lessons. Textbooks can be used by students to revise formerly taught lessons and as a reference to study and keep track of their progress (O'Neil, 1982). Textbooks are also economical and convenient for students to easily access to carefully structured and packaged learning materials. Despite the controversy, textbooks contribute or inhibit the teaching-learning of English, it is widely agreed that textbooks are of great value in the process of teaching and learning (Cunningsworth, 1995; Haycroft, 1998; O'Neil, 1982; Sheldon, 1988; Tomlinson, 2003).

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Taking this into account, the Ethiopian MoE selects a firm from among several bidders to prepare English textbooks at national levels using the grades 1-4 syllabus as a framework. Hence, particular and serious attention must be paid to evaluate such materials based on valid and reliable instruments.

Statement of the problem
In spite of the wealth of experience Ethiopia has on primary EFL instruction, the situation to date seems to be precarious bedeviled by lack of quality as students are still found unable to study other subjects given in English in their post primary grades. In relation to this, several locally conducted studies have revealed that the level of English acquired by the time pupils complete primary grades has been found very poor and this has negatively affected the general level of their academic achievements (Paulos, 1979; Dandir, 1981; Tewolde, 1988; Taddesse, 1990; Dejenie, 1990; Zenebe, 2000; Michael, 2003; Tekeste, 2006). Performances of primary first-cycle leavers on English subject in the Ethiopian Third National Learning Assessment were found to be lamentably very low, far less than the minimum expected by Ethiopian Education and Training Policy (GEQAEA, 2008). Several studies (such as Taddesse, 1990; Zenebe, 2000; Michael, 2003; Tekeste, 2006) recommend the review of the system of teaching English at primary school level in terms of material preparation to necessarily contribute to children's English language learning.

Often textbook is the only resource for both teachers and learners in Ethiopian classroom contexts. If the contents failed to meet children's world experience and if the methods up on which these contents are organized do not consider children's developmental characteristics, textbooks are likely to hinder children's effort to progress on the English language (Gardner, 1993; Komorowska, 1997; Cameron, 2001). Therefore, evaluating first-cycle English textbooks whether or to what extent they contribute to children's progress in the English language seems to be a key to find out potential problems related to primary ELT. Thus, this study employs the in-use evaluation to obtain the most relevant data regarding the degree to which New Ethiopian English textbooks can assist current teachers and learners to attain the objectives set in the syllabus using an established checklist.

This study was aimed at looking into the adequacy and appropriacy of the primary first cycle EFL textbooks to the teaching and learning of EFL to

young learners. It attempted to analyze the English textbooks for Grade 1 - 4 against the criteria recommended.

Research question
To achieve the aim of this study and to guide the process of the appraisal, the following research question has been set.

> How adequate and appropriate are the contents of the first-cycle Primary English textbook to fostering children's English language learning?

Conceptual Framework
In order to appraise language contents of the primary first-cycle English textbooks against criteria of suitable English textbooks for young learners, this study adopted the viewpoints of constructivism (Piaget and Vygotsky) as well as insights from Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researches (such as Krashen and Terrel, 1983) and children's potential characteristics (e.g. curious, talkative) to language learning and used them as a conceptual framework. This framework is used as lens to look into the appropriacy and adequacy of the contents of the grades 1-4 English textbooks and their respective teacher's guides since several recent studies (such as Raya, n.d.; and Balbi, 1997, 2008) attest that successful S/FL teaching/learning at early primary school level is underpinned by principles drawn from these insights. The language lessons embodied in the first cycle English textbooks may evidence are appraised against this skeleton.

3. Methodology
3.1. Document analysis
The major aim of employing document analysis is to gather information on aspects related to the suitability of language contents embodied in the grades 1-4 English textbooks. Accordingly, the primary first cycle English textbooks and their respective teacher's guides were examined in order to see the suitability of the contents in the Grades 1-4 English textbooks with the criteria of a good English textbook.

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis Technique
In this research, data was collected from grades 1-4 English textbooks using document analysis technique. The data required to evaluate the English textbooks were collected not only based on one particular theory proposed by an expert, but the syntheses from different theories proposed by several different experts (Raya, n.d.; Balbi, 1997, 2008). This study then defined the predetermined codes within the developed framework in

order to examine their presences or absences in the teacher's guides and student books. Each of the four sample English textbooks and their respective teacher's guides were then read and reread thoroughly until the information required to responding to the defined template codes were drawn and described (Creswell, 2003).

The findings generalized for each code were referred through the sample extracts drawn and the task and activity types appended and then the writer explained which of the criteria are already met by the book. The generalized descriptions drawn for each code under the major categories were analyzed in light of the reviewed literature. The next step is concluding the result of the analysis in terms of explaining the reasons why each criterion considered meet the criteria of a good textbook or not. In other words, the potential impact that features in the contents of the textbooks could exert on students' learning of and progress in the English language were analyzed with reference to contextual factors and aspects considered vital for EFL teaching to young learners of 6/7 to 9/10 years of age by consulting the literatures. Similar method of analysis has been used to evaluate primary EFL textbooks by Noordin and Abdul Samad (n.d,). Several textbook evaluation framework researchers (for example, Cunningsworth, 1995; Ellis, 1997; Harmer, 2001; McDonough & Show, 2003; Tomlinson, 2003,2008; Ur,1996) have used the checklist-based approach in helping teachers evaluate ELT textbooks. This approach can provide a very economic and efficient way to make certain all pertinent items are considered for appraisal (Cunningsworth, 1995; McGrath, 2002).

Results and Discussion
The results obtained from the analyses of Grade 1-4 English Textbooks and the discussion made subsequently are presented hereunder following the frameworks adapted.

4.1.1. Structure
In order to promote primary first-cycle students' basic communication skills in English, the Ethiopian Ministry of Education   prepares and distributes one English textbook for each grade: *English for Ethiopia Student's Book Grade One(*MoE, 2008), *ENGLISH FOR ETHIOPIA Student Book Grade Two*(MoE, 2010), for example. Each of the student books that are currently in use does not have workbook for students to further supplement their classroom English language learning. The textbook authors prepare teacher's guides for each grade level student

book - for example- *Teacher's Guide for English for Ethiopia, Grade One (MoE, 2008).* The guides and the student books are not attached to any supplementary materials such as pictures, photocopiable sheets (for arts, crafts, games, etc) that could make student's English language learning easier. In addition, there are no video-/audio-cassettes or CDs that could provide students a variety of language inputs; teachers are rather suggested to recount the stories and to sing the songs and chants using the transcripts enclosed in the teacher's manuals.

The findings depict that the teaching and learning of primary first-cycle English in Ethiopia is structured based on the teacher's manuals and student books with little or no supplementary materials. In language improvement programs, the use of EFL textbook to young learners should only be one of the several resources to address children's natural curiosity to explore new things and to make their classroom EFL learning more enjoyable and faster (Mendez & Lopez, 2005; Brown, 2006). It has to include, for example, video, computer, workbook, teacher's guides (bilingual if important) embodying key to the exercises, teaching tips, syllabus, transcription of the audio CD, extra activities, flashcards, photocopiable cutouts, games, audio CD for both teachers and students with songs, stories, dialogues, rhymes, and chants. The use of such new materials can bring forward exquisite activities to involve students and to generate many meaningful contexts for using the target language (Balbi, 1997; 2008; Mendez & Lopez, 2005). Therefore, the only use of textbooks in first-cycle classrooms can hardly contribute particularly in Ethiopia where the goal is to develop children's communication in the English language.

4.1.2 Goals
The analysis of grades 1-4 English teacher's guides indicate that the major aim of the English student books is to build students oral communication whilst cultivating students reading and writing skills in line with the curriculum policy. In light of the overall oral communication aims, the textbook authors also notify teachers the learning outcomes they should focus on while planning and delivering the lessons in each unit:

Students will be able to: exchange greetings and give their names and grade; Name objects in the classroom environment; Follow classroom instructions; Identify and read alphabet letters e, a and t (grade 1); Name and locate objects in the classroom; Give and follow directions; Greet

each other (grade 2); ask for quantities of items and identify basic shapes; talk about classroom /school rules and read a digital clock (grade 3); describe their school; talk about their height and weight; describe their daily activities(grade 4).

The expected outcomes stated in the teacher's guides focus on what students are expected to perform after the lessons in each unit that can guide teacher's instructional focus. The procedures suggested to enable students perform the outcomes encourage teachers to use the classroom students to demonstrate the use of the focused languages which are also relevant for students classroom interaction-for example- to ask/identify new students or to inform individual students in a classroom or otherwise. The frequent interaction teachers are suggested to make with groups of students round the classroom using the focused languages can give students practical experience to understand the words and their use in communication. The support students get from teacher's explanations and illustrations of the use of the languages in a classroom context and from observing selected students' role plays in front of classroom can assist students to understand and meaningfully use the required languages. These show that the activities suggested for students to listen and carry out are in coherence with the expected learning outcomes set.

The learning outcomes teachers are expected to plan and pupils are expected to attain through working the activities in most of the lessons of the English student books are stated in terms of knowledge and performances pupils should display using the studied language in their environment. The sample extracts above also demonstrate that the learning outcomes are specific and measurable and improves teachers' classroom EFL teaching as it links instruction to measurable outcomes and performance standards (Richards, 2001). These indicate that the expected learning outcomes encompassed in the teacher's guides and in the syllabus (as they are same) are realistically achievable for the target groups as the contents and activities suggested in the guides and employed in student books are mostly adequate and appropriate to their age and environment and the languages grow in line with their experience in the English language.

4.1.3 Approach to language
4.1.3.1 Theory of Language
The contents and the activities embodied in the first cycle English textbooks centered on topics that are interesting and familiar to students.

Besides, the language contents encompassed in grades 1-4 English textbooks include other curricular subjects that can give students chances to genuinely use the language. The consistency between the learning outcomes (see section 4.1.2 above) and the contents and the activities students are suggested to engage in as well as the overall communicative aims the teacher's guide indicate that language is viewed as a tool for communication.

The songs, games, riddles, poems, role plays, drawings, movements, mimes, gestures, TPR activities, stories, chants, and rhymes are some of the playful activities embodied in the grades 1-4 English textbooks that engage students to use the language communicatively. The procedures suggested for children to sing the songs--Classroom Objects (Lesson Seven of Unit 1) and Heads, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes (Lesson Four of Unit 2) -- inform children to listen carefully looking at the texts and then to sing the songs accompanying them with action movements such as pointing to, playing eyeglasses with fingers, and touching the appropriate body parts as they are named to make the activities communicative. The actions students are expected to perform when singing songs or saying rhymes or chants or poems, and the repetitive languages (Show me…, point to…or I spy…or Is it…) the texts have can make most of these activities playful and meaningful. The repetitive languages the texts use can help young learners understand the language and easily memorize them and the physical movement accompanied is suitable for kinesthetic intelligence and for all children in general as there is a lot of movement and fun (Lobo, 2003; Balbi, 2008). A lot of TPR activities such as listen and act/point (Lesson Seven, Nine, and Ten of Unit 1, Grade 2), look the picture/read the labels and tell the position of the objects (Lessons Two and Three of Unit 1, grade 2), read and draw a picture (Lesson Eleven of Unit 1, Grade 2). The activities thus encourage students to listen to and understand the languages before applying them to communicate depicting the underlying principles that comprehension pave the way for production and that the English language is viewed as a means to communicate.

The teacher's explanation to clarify a word or particular language patterns and his expectation to demonstrate and/or to model the use of certain language patterns for children to construct sentences of their own and interact with a partner/s as well as the stories their teacher read out loud can also be heeded as a comprehensible inputs. Such uses of ELT

can also witness the theoretical underpinnings that language is viewed as a means for communication.

4.1.3.2 Language Input

The grades one and two student books do not seem to be suitable for children's independent use as many of the texts, instructions or backing support are provided by the teachers as suggested in the teacher's guides. Even though the grade 2, 3 and 4 student books bear printed instructions that could give some leeway for students to work the activities independently unlike the grade 1 which is devoid of printed instructions, few of the imperative language inputs to properly implement the activities in the student's books are provided by the teachers.

The teacher's guides demand teachers to make oral clarifications focusing on the language contents suggested and to exemplify and model their use in a context. Students are also expected to repeat aloud following their teacher and understand the use of the specific languages and then reuse them to exchange true information in a controlled and then freer ways. Teachers are also suggested to read aloud story texts or sing songs for students to listen and act on as they are required.

These and the types of activities stated in 4.1.3.1 show that the main language input grade 1-4 students are expected to act on and develop their proficiency in the English language depend on listening to the teachers and peers and reading the words or phrases and sentence patterns written on the blackboard and in the student books.

4.1.3.3 New language is introduced

The English for Ethiopia Student Books are the main tool in the hands of the learners. Depending on the English language experience first cycle students have, the textbooks employ various methods to assist children to understand the new words/phrases and language patterns. To find out how new language is introduced in the reviewed English textbooks, the following extracts are randomly drawn from grade 1 teacher's guide:

Teachers are required to explain to students words *this* and *that and illustrate how they can be used to ask and answer questions using who/what they have previously learnt*.

Who is this? Who is that?

Various guides are suggested for teachers to employ-for example-Walk around the classroom and repeat the two questions several times.

*Model by pointing to a student and telling the class that when the question is ―**Who is this?**we say, **This is** _____. When the question is **Who is that?** we say, **That is**_____ . Point to a student who is close to you and ask: **Who is this? The other answer by saying This is ____.***

The subsequent lesson, Lesson Two, begins by revising the above lesson and then put forward similar instructional procedures to enable pupils ask using *what* and respond using the words *this/that; students are required to introduce the language pattern but with new words:*

What is this? What is that?

The teacher is required to hold up a pencil and say ***This is a pencil;*** and by pointing to another pencil, ***That is a pencil.***

The subsequent activities also require teachers to introduce new words using similar language pattern. In addition to the actual pupils and objects in the classroom, the textbook encompasses pictures to introduce students to new words and meaningfully practice with the studied language patterns. For example, *This is Abebe. **HE** is a boy. This is Almaz. **SHE** is a girl.*

The teacher is required to practice the new words by saying it aloud-in this case **HE** and **SHE;** *s*o that students may understand these pronouns as new words to practice.

The teacher is also suggested to ask students to look at the pictures in Lesson Four of student book and to point to the words *he/she*. The teacher is also asked to choose two students (a boy and a girl) to role play the languages before the class, and afterwards to arrange students into groups to practice the languages through asking and answering each other:

Who's this? This is ….She is a girl. Or He is a boy.

The grade 1 teacher's guide also note that teachers use gestures, mimes and actions to help children understand new words/phrases such as stand up (by raising their hand), sit down (by lowering their hand) (Lesson One, Unit 1 of grade 1) or act looking- I see with these (my eyes), act listening-I hear with these (my ears), act eating—I eat with these (my

teeth) (Lessons Three and Four of Unit 2, grade 1) or put the book under the table or put two sticks on the book or put the stone on chair (Lesson Four of Unit 12 of grade 1).

These imply that teachers are expected to use body languages and demonstrations, classroom objects and pupils, use of L1 and known words/phrases and situations, and pictures which learners can see and experience as well as reuse of known words or phrases to make new words and sentence patterns comprehensible to pupils in an age-appropriate ways in line with the constructive approach to teaching FLs to YLs. What is more, the songs, games and chants encompassed in the textbooks are also used to introduce children to the new words/sentence patterns through accompanying them with various actions such as touching, pointing to, clapping and through using similar situations and repetitive languages.

To make the new languages embodied in the textbooks understandable to children, teachers are also advised to translate them into L1 at different times while teaching the textbooks, for example, to tell the names of the new words included in the textbooks, to translate some stories, to clarify instructions on how to do activities and rules on how to play games. Teachers are also suggested to begin new lessons by reviewing the previously learned lessons and creating links with the new ones to support students' comprehension of the new words while at the same time the known ones are recycled which is in line with the principles advocated in natural and constructive approach (i + 1). Children eagerly explore to understand and use the language through the physical activities (Hammer, 2001; Cameron, 2001).

4.1.3.4 Language use
The grades 1-4 English textbooks employ various strategies to encourage students practice the newly introduced languages. The tasks and activity types used to illustrate *the language input* the textbooks use and how *new language is introduced* above, for example, can also be used to show that the textbooks encourage students to use the English language meaningfully.

The grade 2-4 student books employ a number of stories and short and long reading passages that are related to the main themes for students to listen/read, speak and write which are cognitively more demanding when compared to the types of activities in grade 1 student book. The grade 1

student book enquires students to listen to and understand listening/reading text beginning from Lesson Five, Unit 6 (*The Goat)* which are cognitively more demanding when compared to the earlier lessons which focus on identification and qualification of objects and events using distinct words, phrases and sentences. The activities thus help students to identify the names of classroom objects or body parts or numbers or colours or animals using concrete objects and here and now situations, where meaning is conveyed through visual and physical contextual clues and moves to a more abstract context where the focus is more on the language itself.

Grade 1 student book employ lessons that introduce students to English small letters and then to the sounds they correspondingly represent to cultivate their basic reading and writing skills, while lessons in grade 2, 3 and 4 student books includes a lot of stories and short and long passages (the size and numbers increase as the grade level increases) to cultivate students true reading and writing skills. These activities can then illustrate that activities embodied in students textbook are typically organized and sequenced in an increasing order of difficulties from concrete to more abstract to gradually cultivate students' knowledge on the theme and build up their English language experience.

Students are also required to use the African map in Lesson Six of Unit 3 in grade 3 student book to ask each other to point to Ethiopia and to tell two countries close to Ethiopia in the map. (Geography). Activity 2 of Lesson Four in Unit 3 introduce students to various weather words through pictures and reading passage *Weather Report* and Activity 1 of Lesson Ten in Unit 4 enquire students to find out the various seasons and the special activities during the rainy season and the dry season through pictures and reading passage *Rain Maker* in grade 4 student book (Geography). In the same unit, the grade 3 student book further enquire students to count the different shapes in the picture and write their names and numbers (circle, triangle, rectangle, square, line) (mathematics). Lessons Four, Six and Twelve in grade 2 student book require pupils to talk about the weather using weather words such as sunny, rainy, cloudy, cold, hot (Science).The last unit of grade 1 textbooks also demands learners to freely talk about what they learned in mathematics, environmental science and aesthetics lessons using appropriate English words. These are additional manifestations of the link the English lessons have with other curricular subjectsto provide children chances to interact genuinely using the language.

Teacher's support and encouragement for pupils to experiment the language they have practiced encourages children to take responsibility to self English learning apart from what teachers can do in classroom consistent with the principles advocated in natural approach (Krashen & Terrel, 1983; Pinter 1999). Even though interactive activities mainly promote young learners language learning, practicing certain language patterns through repeating/drilling can also contribute to the target language development (Cameron, 2001).

The sampled extracts above and the activity types that require children to make physical movements, sing songs, say rhymes, chants or poems, play games, puzzles or riddles, listen and tell stories, role play, draw pictures or describe pictures, solve word problems related to other curricular activities, work activities individually and/or in pairs or groups can demonstrate that the reviewed books present the English language in a variety of ways to cater young learners different interests and preferences. The student books support visual learners' English language learning through using a variety of colorful illustrations and picture cards that teachers are suggested to supplement some activities in the textbooks. Auditory learners are provided with various opportunities to hear and repeat various vocabularies, phrases and sentence patterns. The textbooks also address these learners English language learning through embodying songs, poems, stories and chants. Kinesthetic students reinforce their English language learning through carrying out Total Physical Response (TPR) activities encompassed in the textbooks. Children are very much linked to their surroundings and are more interested in the physical and the tangible (Shin, n.d.).

The reviewed student books, however, lack technologically mediated and hands-on activities to assist tactile students manipulate various concrete things such as measuring, cutting and pasting papers and cards to make things (airplanes, masks, puppets) that are significant to motivate students to stay on doing the activities using the language and can fix the language more easily (Lobo, 2003; Balbi, 2008). Creating a multi-sensory and multi-media learning environment in young learners' EFL classrooms do not only facilitate students EFL learning, children's overall personality growth is also equally addressed (Gardner, 1993; Cunningsworth, 1995; Lobo, 2003; Balbi, 2008).

4.2.3.5 Language contents

The tables of contents of the grades 1-4 English student books indicate that the contents embodied are structured based on 15 (grade 1) and 14 (grades 2-4) thematic units. In addition to the contents on the themes, each unit in grade 1 student book encompasses three English letter contents structured from the most to the least frequented English letters-begins with letters *t, d,* and *l* and ends with *x, j, q* and *z* and not in alphabetical order. The themes up on which the contents and activities center on are environments that are familiar and close to students to make them suitable to students' cognitive and socio-cultural experiences (Shin, n.d.; Khan, 1995; Kirkgoz, 2006).

The contents of grade 1 student book under the theme 'Greetings' (Unit 1) include contents such as greetings and self-introductions as well as identifying classroom objects; the grade 2 student book on similar theme 'Classroom Objects' (Unit 1) also encompasses similar contents to enable students to identify and locate some classroom objects and to exchange greetings. The grades 3 and 4 English textbooks also encompass contents on similar themes 'At School' and 'My School'. The contents of grade 1 student book under the themes 'Parts of the Body' (Unit 2), 'What is it called in English?' (Unit 3), 'Colours' (Unit 4), 'Counting'(Unit 5) are repeated in the contents of grade 2 student book under similar themes 'How Many Books' (Unit 2), 'What Colour is your Bag?' (Unit 3), and 'Parts of the Body' (Unit 4). The grades 3 and 4 student books are also organized on similar themes such as 'Let's Wash our Hands' (Unit 4) and 'Let's Keep Fit' (Unit 4), respectively, talks mainly about body parts. The contents such as 'duster, pen, table, sticks' as well as 'counting numbers and objects' under the themes 'Greetings' and 'Counting' in grade 1 are reused under the theme 'How Many Books' such as 'pen, pencils, books, sticks and counting them one to twenty' to make various sentences 'what is on the table?' 'The book is under the table'. This then indicates that the reviewed student books are also organized recycling some of the themes and the contents across grade levels. The number of words included in each unit and grade level varies: each unit in grade 1 student book encompasses on average 23.07 vocabularies while each unit in grade two student book contain 46.86 vocabularies. The total number of vocabularies in grades one and two student books are 346 (36, 33, 27, 35, 33, 27, 13, 8, 42, 28, 33, 40, 21, 29 and 32) and 656 (33, 26, 44, 34, 62, 59, 62, 75, 19, 105, 34, 54, 37 and 12), respectively. From grade 1 and grade 2 words 210 and 177 words (60.69 percent and 26.98 percent) are recycled two or more times.

The sampled information above thus entail that the contents around which children's English language is cultivated are organized in thematic format and in cyclical sequence both within and across each grade level student book. Children's motivation to working on activities centered on same theme can be maintained and children's natural tendency to forget and to work with interest are also addressed as the activities suggested are short and varied and the contents are recycled. These indicate that the organizations of the contents of the reviewed student books consider students' developmental characteristics.

In addition to being a model for their accent in English, teachers are also suggested to give explicit instruction on pronunciation focusing on pronunciation contents such as pronouncing final-s/-es sound, contracted forms, syllable, word stress, falling and rising intonation, comparing English letter sounds with Amharic letter sounds, identifying the beginning and ending letter, reading aloud, sounds of various words. In countries where its use is mainly restricted in classrooms, additional direct instruction to help YLs learn the phonological features of the English language that could offset possible short comings in EFL situations.

Most of the grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation contents are integrated with the practice of the four language skills reinforcing children's skills of communication without being treated in isolation in line with the principles of the constructive/communicative approach and children's levels of cognitive development (Brumfit, 1995; Cameron, 2001; Balbi, 2008).

The results of the analyses of the contents encompassed in the student books in sections 6.1.3.1 and 6.1.3.4 above demonstrate that the grades 1-4 student books include songs and games that are communicative to help students to use the language in context. Some of the songs such as *Good Morning*, and *Goodbye songs, Alphabet Song* and N*umber Song* are shorter containing few simple sentences, while songs like 'Hokey-Pokey', 'If You are Happy and You Know It', 'School Days', 'House Song', and 'Old Yakob Had a Farm' appear longer and contain simple, compound and complex sentences.

The various games encompassed in the textbooks require children to cooperate in their respective groups to win the games as there are no individual winners in the game. From among the competitive games embodied in the reviewed student books, *sounds game* and *Simon Says*

game can demonstrate their presence in the student books and their contribution to ELT to the target group.

The Sounds Game provide students various opportunities to frequently listen to various words to identify and say the word/s with the specified letters and sounds (letter c and ke-sound) to win the games which give students a good practice to develop students' receptive and productive skills. Students' natural desire to win the game also encourages them to stay in the game practicing the languages. The rule enquire game leaders to give instructions using 'Simon says' and vocabularies of body parts and players to listen to the instructions and respond accordingly which can give students opportunities to listen to and use the language. Besides, the riddle (Activity 1 of Lesson 6, Unit 1) in grade 4 student book enquire students to read the riddles and write their answers before playing with their partners through asking and answering the riddles which encourage students to read, write, listen and speak the language while competing among each other to win the game. *What is in my Bag?, Yes/No game, Memory Game, Simon says game,* and *I Spy game, Sounds game, Odd One Out game*, number and letter *Bingo* and the riddles such as *Listen and Guess the Animal, What is in the Box?, What am I?, Donkey, Donkey, goat* appear to be competitive due to the individual effort each emphasize, while cooperative games such as *team games, mingle game, clapping game, Memory Game* are where groups effort are valued.

A game is played when one or more student players engage in competition or cooperation for pay offs according to a given set of rules (Khan, 1995).

Children's interests to work individually and/or cooperatively interacting with others are thus addressed. Besides, the inclusion of such playful cooperative and competitive games can foster children's motivation and ensure learning as the amount of time children spend working on the language input can increase (Khan, 1995; Tongue, 1995; Moon, 2005). Children learn new English words or phrases mainly incidentally through allowing them to play and to interact using the new languages with teachers and their partners (Shin, n.d.; Driscoll, 1999; Cameron, 2001). The fact that the songs, the games and the riddles involve repetitions, competitions and actions can provide YLs fun and interest to get involved and use the target language; and YLs often find it worth learning language in order to play a new game (Khan, 1995; Rixon, 1995).

The results of the analysis of the contents of the grades 1-4 English textbooks under the category Approach (section 6.2.4) thus indicate that the topics chosen are desirous for the target groups, grammar is treated in context with few explicit grammar teaching, activities encourage students to understand, drill and then meaningfully use the language, most of the activities embodied present the four skills in an integrated form, teachers are suggested to use classroom English with minimum L1 though textbook authors actually suggest teachers to use L1 frequently for different purposes such as to inform some vocabularies, clarify stories, give instructions, and teachers are also suggested to encourage students to use the language to exchanging information. What is more, the embodiment of interesting topics and playful activities, recycling of contents and activities, varied and fragmented activities that focus on here and now situations, use of TPR activities, games, songs, chants, poems, riddles, and stories accompanied with pictures, use of movements, gestures to help students understand the new words and practice them in context, students involvement in group/pair work, and similar others show the use of the principles recommended in the constructive approach to teaching EFL to young learners. Proponents of primary EFL teaching suggests that students learn most effectively when they are involved and they are involved when they are interested and thus the use of activities and contents that are enjoyable and appropriate to their cognitive development are crucial (Gardner, 1993; Cameron, 2001; Moon, 2005).

4.1.4 Treatment of the four skills

The reviewed guides notify to teachers the methods they should follow to presenting the lessons embodied in the textbooks and the skills they should focus on while presenting the lessons. The skills suggested to be focused on are given at the beginning of most of the lessons in the teacher's guides classifying them into listening, speaking, pre-reading, pre-writing, reading, and writing. The skills focused on in grade 1 student book includes the pre-reading and pre-writing skills to also prepare students for true reading and writing skills, while the skills in grades 2-4 student books mainly focus on in cultivating the four main skills. The pre-reading and –writing skills which are also called emergent literacy skills are the reading/writing behaviours that YLs should develop before involving them in true reading and writing activities (Grant, 2001; Westwood, 2001; Cameron, 2001). These include the training of basic skills of marks on books (prints) such as understanding print on the page

conveys meaning to those who can read and that readers can convert this print into spoken language, understanding where a reader begins to read a story and processes the print from left to right across and down the page while reading a story (Grant, 2001;Westwood, 2001). This also includes how to handle implements and form letters and pictures so as to develop children's skills of writing.

Among the activities included in grade 1 English textbooks, 19.61 percent is apportioned to listening comprehension while 8.44 percent to speaking activities. Other activities devoted to both speaking and listening skills (such as Listen and repeat, Listen and sing a song, or Listen and answer) make up 29.69 percent. However, activities thattreat both reading and writing comprise 42.11 percent. Therefore, 57.89 percent of activities in grade one English textbook are devoted to improving students' listening and speaking skills which imply that much of classroom time is allocated to cultivate children's oral communications. From 1215 activities encompassed in grade 2 English textbook to improve children's communication skills in the English language, 61.40 percent (40.58 percent to listening-235L + 258L/S-and 42.06 percent to speaking-253S + 258L/S) is devoted to practice the listening and speaking skills, while the reading and writing activities encompass the rest, 38.60 percent. The above data thus witness that the grades 1 and 2 reviewed guides and textbooks put more emphasis on enhancing students' oral and aural skills.

From 1141 activities embodied in grade 3 student book, most of the activities (30.15 percent) is devoted to reading, while listening (23.31 percent), speaking (19.19 percent) and writing (18.58 percent) activities takes the others share. From 1026 activities treated in grade 4 student book, students are encouraged to mostly engage to reading (33.43 percent) and writing (28.17 percent) activities, when compared to the amount of time they are required to spend doing listening (22.22 percent) and speaking (16.18percent) activities. Unlike what are suggested in the syllabus and teacher's guides, the grades 3 and 4 student books demand students to dedicate most of their time doing reading and listening and reading and writing skills, respectively.

The various activities presented to teaching reading and writing of the English letters are, thus, also used to enhance students oral skills as students are required to construct different sentences orally based on structure of the letters: 'the letters *a, o, c* are short letters and the letters *l,*

d, t are tall letters' or 'there are more short letters in the box' or 'there are less tall letters in the box'. Learners practice writing and reading of the letters through frequently miming and naming them and students listening and speaking skills are also cultivated using the letter shapes as objects to talk about. Studying letters in groups can help students to easily remember their shape when reading or writing words and/or texts which is vital to build up students reading and writing skills (Westwood, 2001; Cameron, 2001). The procedures suggested to introduce English letters thus include direct instruction, and through building contexts capitalizing on their shapes. Identical teaching procedures are suggested in the teacher's guide to presenting the remaining English letters. These indicate that students are given chances to practicing their listening and speaking skills while at the same time they are building on their letter naming and identification skills.

The other activity types the reviewed textbooks employ to equip students with phonemic awareness through direct instruction include 'name the English letters and say their corresponding sounds', 'name the objects in the picture and write the words in their alphabetical order', 'think of a word that begins with the called out letter and tell to the class', 'copy the letter chart matching the capital and the small letters', 'listen/read one and more syllable words and sort out as short and long', 'listen and raise your one finger if the stress is on the first syllable', 'two fingers if the stress is on the second syllable and three fingers if the third is stressed', 'listen the letter and say the animal word that begin with it', 'read the letters and say the sounds they represent to your partner', 'unscramble the scrambled letters to get words of the day and write them', 'copy the letter chart and write words that begin in each letter', (spelling test), 'fill in the missed letters referring to words in the Word Bank'. These show that the reviewed textbooks employ synthetic and analytic phonic approach to enhance their word recognition and decoding skills.

The activity types such as 'Listen to your teacher reading plural words and then write *z* if the ending sounds like /z/ and *s* if the ending sounds like /s/', 'ask your partner to spell 10 spelling words from units 1-6', 'write the-s and –es form of the verbs given', 'write three more funny sentences about family members making each word in the sentences begins with same sound', 'write list of verbs that end with –ing', study words that have similar spelling patterns such as light, night, fight, or say, pay, day, ray, for example, can also demonstrate that the later grade level textbooks employ activities that could enrich students' sight vocabularies

and help them to make analogies of the sounds of similar spelling patterns while reading new words. Such activity types are features of phonics work with a focus on selecting particular phonemes and associated graphemes and practicing recognizing the phonemes-letters link (Westwood, 2001; Christie, 2005). Equipping students with blending phonemes to sound out words and segmenting a word into its separate components are vital phonological skills that can secure students reading progress (Westwood, 2001; Christie, 2005). Proponents of phonics approach to the teaching of reading to children support the teaching of letter-sound correspondence in a meaningful way and argue that the teaching of phonics is essential as a foundation for all reading behavior (Thogmartin, 1997; Grant, 2001; Westwood, 2001; Christie, 2005).

The other activity types employed in the reviewed textbooks cultivate children phonemic awareness without direct instruction as they are made to engage in oral and aural classroom interactions and more particularly as they are made to listen to many stories or other texts, to listen to/repeat/read aloud a lot of songs, poems and rhymes and to play games that engage students holistically with the texts (Thogmartin, 1997; Grant, 2001; Westwood, 2001).For example, the activity that enquire students to practically understand the use of the preposition *on* by changing the objects for students to subsequently apply in classroom context require teachers to write the word *on* on the blackboard saying it aloud for students to look at and to repeat it aloud. Such activity types focus on cultivating students' oral skills which also familiarize students to the key printed word *on* by associating it with the sound and the concept it symbolizes. The teacher's guide suggests identical teaching procedures to teaching the other prepositions 'under' and 'in'. Students are further required to listen to/read their teacher reading the labels aloud and then to point to the picture that represents the sentence read out loud in the student book. These imply that students are encouraged to use cues from the spoken words, the printed words and the picture to answer the questions (pointing to the right picture).These imply that the reviewed student books employ word recognition activities to cultivate students reading and writing skills while mainly students oral skills are addressed (whole language approach) (Cameron, 2001; Naggy and Balbi, 2008) in line with the emphasis the syllabus espouses. The instruction given in the student book also demands students to tell the position of the objects in the pictures assisted by the prompts in the pictures and their word recognition skills and letter-sound link knowledge to decode the information in the labels. The analyses thus show that the textbooks

employ tasks and activities which come under logographic, alphabetic and orthographic stages to enhance YLs' word identification and thus their reading development (Westwood, 2001; Grant, 2001). Such aspects of phonemic skills students may develop through working the activity types in the three strategies are presumed to be vital by researchers for YLs' reading development (Thogmartin, 1997; Westwood, 2001).

These also show that students can apply their oral language skills, letter/sound link knowledge and skills, visual memory (word recognition) skills, and picture reading skills to answer the comprehension questions which also signal the link between students' phonological skills and reading ability (Ur, 1996; Cameron, 2001; Nagy and Balbi, 2008). Therefore, children's understanding of the sound feature of the English language including that speech sounds are made up of a string of individual words, and that words are made up of one or more syllables, and that syllables are made up of units of sound are crucial to learn how to decode words (Ur, 1996; Cameron, 2001; Christie, 2005; Nagy and Balbi, 2008).

The pre-reading activities that focus on letters and their sounds and word recognition activities and the focus made on oral/aural skills development can thus be a basis for students to work on the true reading activities. In reading students move on from reading and identifying English letters to their corresponding sounds and from seeing and tracing the shapes of letters and words to reading words and short sentences which are also vital to develop students' writing skills. The sequences of the activities in grades 1 and 2 student books thus indicate that many of the practice activities focus on oral skills, and reading and writing activities are extensions of listening and speaking activities; but in grades 3 and 4 student books most of the practice activities are extensions of storytelling/reading activities. These show that stories and passages in grades 3 and 4 gradually become the major contents for students to practice listening, reading, speaking and writing skills.

The activities in the grade 1 student book introduce students to the English letters through sequencing the letters from the most to the least common stressing the common sounds of the letters (for example the letter *c* is introduced as it has the sound in *cat*) and then to capital letters, consonants and vowels, syllables in the subsequent grade levels (phonic method). Whole language approach is also used to cultivate students true reading skills in grades 1-4 textbooks in line with the guideline. The

minimum learning competencies grade 1 students are expected to acquire as the grades 1-4 syllabus (MoE, 2009) notes focus on naming and saying the sounds of the letters, point to letters named, and read 25 sight words related to people, animals, objects and colours initial letters. The analysis of the reading acquisition activities embodied in the grade 1 teacher's guides and student book indicate that they are mainly restricted to word recognition and to identifying and writing of the English alphabets. The analysis also evidenced that it is at the end of grade 1 student book, unit 9, that students are introduced to the sounds the English letters symbolize. It is in the middle of grade 2 (Unit 7, Lessons One to Six) that students are introduced to consonant and vowels, stress/unstress, and syllables crucial to cultivate students decoding skills. Among others, students' phonological knowledge, their ability to identify individual sounds and syllables that make up words are crucial to reading (Ur, 1996; Cameron, 2001; Nagy, 2008). However, against the MLCs the document put forward after the completion of the grade 1 textbook, students are required to read printed instructions in grade 2 without sufficient phonemic and/or spoken knowledge/skills. Therefore, the printed instructions given to activities embodied in grade 2 English student's book can make more harms than benefits.

The pre-writing and writing activity types that encourage students to develop their skills of writing in grades 1 and 2 textbooks include 'draw patterns similar to the English letters', 'write the English letters using your body', 'listen and mime the letters in the air or on the desk', 'look and guess the letters mimed in the air', 'name the written English letters'. The activity types thus encourage students to produce spoken/written work for others to listen/read and to reply by answering questions, making drawing, filling in a chart, labeling a diagram, and then to checking each other's works and so on which indicate purposeful language use (Williams, 1995; Cameron, 2001).

The analysis thus indicate that the reviewed student books employ phonics methods which rely on the teaching of the sounds that the letters of the alphabet and/or their combination represent and whole-language approach mainly on meaning to gradually cultivate students reading and writing skills. Several authorities (such as Ur, 1996; Cameron, 2001; Gersten & Gevea, 2003; Nagy & Balbi, 2008) argue that beginning to read and write the FL involves learning an entire new set of written symbols. They then contend that cultivating students letter-naming and their corresponding sounds, word reading, oral reading fluency, and

comprehension can predict students' future reading skills. Therefore, the use of combination of phonics method and whole-language approach seems to be appropriate to introduce students to the new set of written symbols and to gradually develop students reading and writing skills.

4.2.5 Texts and topics

The contents of the listening and reading texts embodied in the grades 1-4 English student books centered on topics that include animals, school, activities in community that the target groups are familiar with.

The story text *The Lost Butterfly* (Lesson Four of Unit 1, Grade 2) talks about a student who lost his butterfly and is sitting sad in classroom and who finally recovered the butterfly after searching different places in classroom, assisted by his friends. The stories titled *Yonas and The Animals* (Parts I, II and III) also narrate about two boys who lost and then found one of the animals they were looking after in the country side. The story about the small rat (Lesson Two of Unit 9, grade 1) talks about the small hungry rat when asking different big animals for food, but that finally got the food in a narrow hole. The story *The Baby Bird* (Lesson Nine of Unit 10, grade 2 student book) narrates about scary encounters that the baby bird faces when she leaves out of her living nest disregarding her parent birds' advice.

Stories of such types tend to provoke children's emotional reactions such as laughter, sadness, disappointment, anticipation and this tendency prepare YLs to listen to/read and talk and write about the plot and the characters involved in the stories which is vital to enhance their English language learning along with their social and emotional development (Mattheoudakis et al., 2007).YLs tend to categorize themselves with story characters and thus become personally involved in the plot (Mattheoudakis et al., 2007). The analysis of the contents embodied in the texts (such as mothers care for their children, how children come and go to school, children obey mothers and fathers' order) indicate that most of the contents selected in the stories consider pupils background and respect the values and culture of the people in the country. Listening and/or reading texts that are culturally and/or experientially familiar to the target groups cue students to easily construct meaning (Ur, 1996; Cameron, 2001; Nagy, 2008; Nagy and Balbi, 2008). Through exposing early primary school pupils to situations of their experience including other curricular subjects, they can get genuine purpose for their language

learning and for their learning in general which can invigorate their interest to use and practice the target language (Holderness, 1995).

The story *Families* (Lesson Five of Unit 7 of grade 1) describes about the families of three different students and thus listening/reading about the first can help students guess about the second and the third that can reinforce students' comprehension of the story and future use of the desired languages. The story *Animal Can* (Lesson Six of Unit 13) also talks about what different animals can do using repetitive language structure by changing their names and abilities such as 'animals can run. Giraffe can run. Animals can hop. A kangaroo can hop' to assist students practice and grasp the use of the word *can* that has been also treated in the earlier lessons (Lessons Three, Four and Five). The story *People and Objects We Find At School* (Lesson Two of Unit 11, Grade 1) contains two settings-school and classroom-to talk about what is/are available in school and in classroom using repetitive language structures -there are/is…can you find them? The text *Where is My Cat?* (Lesson Eleven of Unit 3). Such repetitive use of sentence patterns by changing words can assist students to guess the meaning of the frequently used sentence pattern and/or the words/phrases substituted to comprehend the story and to secure students' future use of the sentence patterns and words. The parallelism, or repetition of grammatical patterns that occurs across most of the texts, is likely to be helpful to young learners' language learning. Such structured texts can assist pupils to infer meanings of words and then provide a natural support for their English language learning (Kolsawalla, 1999; Cameron, 2001; Nagy and Balbi, 2008).

To make the texts suitable to the target groups and promote students English language learning, they are presented accompanied with pictures and different types of questions. Presenting stories accompanying with pictures, activating students background with various questions before reading and/or telling stories, pausing in the middle of second reading for students to guess or recall, and giving chances for students themselves to retell or talk about the stories can create interest in students in addition to the language learning opportunities they provide (Cameron, 2001; Balbi, 2008; Brewster, 1995). The pre-, while-and Post-listening/reading tasks and language related activities also encourage students to rehearse the languages they have listened/read and to build up their speaking and writing competences (Mattheoudakis et al., 2007). Therefore, the support provided and the demand put forward in listening and reading texts are

likely to suit to student's age and to enhance students' language use to promote students oral and printed language acquisition.

Lessons One, Three and Five of Unit 14 of grade 1 provide activities to familiarize students with the letter sounds of v (ve-Amharic), w (we-Amharic) and z (ze-Amharic). The texts of the stories of *Feven (Lesson One of Unit 14, Grade 1), Weldu, Weinshet and Wendimu (Lesson Three of Unit 14, Grade 1),* and *Classmates (Lesson Five of Unit 14, Grade 1)* seem to be invented to familiarize students to the English sounds the letters v (*ve* sound), w (*we* sound) and z (*ze* sound) represent by embodying characters whose name begin and/or ends with the focused sounds. These imply that some of the listening and/or reading texts encompassed in the teacher's guides and/or student books seem to be invented to create contexts to practice the languages students have learned and/or to reinforce their use in different contexts and thus may not be enjoyable to students.

Along with the opportunities the texts create for learning language in a meaningful and motivating context, students' sustained exposure to different text types such as dialogues, narratives, songs, and poems can promote students reading and writing abilities (Kolsawalla, 1999; Cameron, 2001; Mattheoudakis et al., 2007). The meaningful and comprehensible input students get by listening to/reading such story texts introduce them to a number of words in context and their involvement in resolving the subsequent questions help them to assimilate the words into their growing lexicon and promote their language acquisition (Kolsawalla, 1999; Mattheoudakis et al., 2007).

4.2.6 Lay out

The front covers of grades 1, 2, 3, & 4 bear a coloured photo of teachers and students with different decorations made on the cover pages to address students' affection to English language learning; grade 1 students' book lacks coloured margins like the other three grades. All the covers use photographs rather than portraits of animals or otherwise that may interest children to learn the language.

The title of the units and the lesson numbers are printed in block letters, but the font size of the former is consistently bigger than the latter in all units of the reviewed student books. These titles of the units and lesson numbers are printed in colours in all units of grades 2-4 student books unlike the grade 1 which are printed on smooth white. Similarly, the top

and bottom margins of all the pages of grades 2-4 student books are coloured, while the top and bottom margins of all the pages of the grade 1 student book remained white, not attractive. The font size of the contents of 'letter writing' sections and the story texts are bigger when compared to the letter size of the labels of the pictures in all units of grade 1 student book. The sizes of the letters of all the contents embodied in all units of the grade 2-4 student books are consistently big. The whole unit and lesson numbers, words in the Word Banks, song texts, one of the conversant sayings in conversation passages, and the even or odd numbers in the number tables of grades 2-4 student books are highlighted with various colours unlike the contents in grade 1 textbook that are smooth white. Each page in all the units of grade 1 student book has wide space, unlike the pages in all units of grades 2-4 student books which are less wide. The contents in all student books are printed in a legible way with quality printing to the target learners and no pages in all units of the reviewed books bear any smudges. These indicate that the layouts of the pages of the reviewed textbooks are suitable and motivating to the target students though the layout of the grade 1 student book bear some edition problems in terms of letter size and coloured contents and margins (Chang, n.d.; Mendez and Lopez, 2005). The wide spaces each page has limit the number of words children are provided on each page and then can motivate and make the language contents visible and comprehensible to young learners of 7 to 8 years of age (Mendez and Lopez, 2005). The pictures in Lessons Two and Three and Lesson Six of Unit 3 of grade 2 student book are directly related to the contents of the labels to support students' comprehension of listening /reading the labels and answer the questions as the pictures clue students to remember the names of the objects (duster, the table, the basket and the house) and/or the position words (on/under or near) in the labels without teachers' help.

The analysis thus indicate that most of the pictures in the reviewed textbooks seem to be clear and simple to directly convey the concepts in the listening and reading texts in line with students' levels of cognitive capacity, while some appear to be difficult and confusing for target students to understand the texts as they involve pictures unrelated to the texts or as they lack details in the texts. Pictures at this level are not expected to go against the text and confuse children English language learning and thus illustrations should be clear and neat and should convey most of contents in the text, or magnify the text and an integral part to an understanding of the text (Chang, n.d.; Kolsawolloy, 1999; Pinter, 1999; Nodelman, 2003; Mendez & Lopez, 2005).

4.2.7 Teacher's Guide

The grades 1 and 2 teacher's guides are thick containing 273 and 263 pages, consecutively, that provide teachers general introductory guidance on the teaching of language items and skills presented in the student books. This entails that first-cycle English teachers need to be proficient in the English language to comprehend the information in the teacher's manuals and properly handle the student books.

The manuals inform teachers to give students chances to be creative, to play (grade 1) or to learn (grade 2-4) and to have fun, and to use visuals (such as real objects, persons or animals or pictures that closely resemble them using their true colours). The manuals also advise teachers to teach grammars in a meaningful ways integrating them with the four skills and not to give lengthy instruction on the grammar items. The manuals also present some notes on lesson planning and classroom assessment for teachers to apply while using the students' books. The teacher's books suggest guides about how the textbook can be used to the utmost advantage of the student.

Summary

The results of the analyses of the grades 1-4 English textbooks and the English curriculum reveal that they are mostly adequate and appropriate to promote young students' acquisition of basic communication skills in the English language as they are found mostly reflecting the theories and principles underpinning the constructive and the natural approach to EFL teaching to young learners. The criteria used in the analyses of the textbooks are the supplementary materials accompanied the textbook, the goal targeted, the approach to language and language learning which include how language is viewed, the language input suggested, how new languages are introduced, use and practice of the new languages, organization and presentations of language contents, the treatment of the four skills, as well as the topics and texts selected, lay out of the textbooks, and teacher's books.

The grade 2 English student book, however, unlike what is espoused in the curriculum, bears printed instructions that enquire students to read and understand to do the tasks and activities embodied in it without giving students adequate exposure to the reading skills in grade 1 English textbooks and against the oral and aural emphasis the syllabus and the teacher's guides claim to give. Besides, the lack of resources such as

workbooks, supplementary readings, audio-and video-recordings, technology related materials or maps or board games that are crucial to kindle students' interest to use the language and stay motivated in doing the activities appear to sap the quality of the syllabus and the textbooks and then students speedy English language acquisitions.

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